



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, December 26 – 31, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Nothing to report as staff took a few days off for the Holidays.

Hunters, other recreationists, and landowners can help FWP monitor the population by reporting wolf observations, tracks, or sign through the FWP online reporting button [Contact Us - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks](#), by contacting the closest wolf specialist or FWP office, or mailing a wolf observation card.

Flights: Asher flew on 12/17 in the Paradise Valley and Big Timber areas.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 12/28, WS killed two wolves from the Battlefield pack (Big Hole Valley). Efforts to remove the remaining wolves are ongoing. The shoot on site permit issued to the landowner is still valid.

On 12/28, one lion hunting dog was killed and 2 others were injured in the Roscoe / Luther area northwest of Red Lodge. All three dogs were wearing radio tracking devices commonly used by lion hunters. There were wolf tracks around the dead dog, which had severe bite wounds on the neck and back. The injured dogs also had bite wounds, but they are expected to heal and the dogs will survive.

On 12/29, WS investigated 4 dead lambs in the Dell area south of Dillon. The lambs were killed by coyotes.

On 12/29, WS confirmed that wolves killed one calf and injured two other calves on private land near Polaris in the Grasshopper drainage (Big Hole area). This is a different landowner than where the earlier loss in December occurred. The Horse Prairie pack was previously reported as having killed a

calf on 12/9, and incremental lethal control was authorized at that time. One wolf was killed on 12/31. The landowner still has a valid shoot on site permit and efforts to remove 1 more wolf are ongoing.

On 12/31, WS killed 3 wolves from the Mitchell Mountain pack north of Helena. Efforts to remove the remaining wolves are ongoing. The landowner still has a valid shoot on sight permit.

### **Outreach and Education**

It is the time of year when wolves disperse in search of mates just ahead of the breeding season. From December through February, FWP and WS usually document an increase in wolf-dog encounters for all domestic dog breeds, particularly breeds used to hunt or pursue mountain lions as the dogs can be away from and out of sight of their owners for periods of time. Wolves can act aggressively towards domestic dogs and kill dogs at any time of year, but that is particularly true leading up to and during the breeding season when wolves are inherently more aggressive towards each other and compete for breeding opportunities.

FWP reminds people that when wolves are in the area, be aware that they may be especially aggressive towards dogs at this time of year. Because wolves may detect dogs and usually perceive them as “competitors” they sometimes return to the area. In rural or remote areas, FWP encourages dog owners to keep dogs in secure kennels or inside buildings at night and to not let them roam freely when humans are not around during the daylight hours. When fresh wolf sign is found, place dogs on restraints and keep supervised.

Montana state law allows individuals to non-injuriously harass a wolf anytime it is too close to humans, livestock or domestic dogs. Citizens may also kill a wolf seen attacking or killing domestic dogs. The incident should be reported to FWP within 72 hours, sooner if possible. If you have concerns or problems with wolves close to your residence, outbuildings, your domestic livestock or pets, please inform the closest wolf specialist or FWP Office nearest you.

### **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On 12/16, a resident shot an adult male wolf in the East Fork Yaak River area in defense of livestock. The incident occurred on private land. The wolves appeared to be focused on horses and dogs on that day and were also reported chasing the horses the previous day. FWP Enforcement investigated and determined that the shooting was lawful under Montana statutes.

On 12/29 in the Bear Creek area in the Madison Valley south of Ennis, an area landowner shot a wolf that was in his yard and reported to be acting aggressively. The incident occurred around 5pm. FWP Enforcement has been notified and will investigate.

### **Other Updates**

#### **2009 Wolf Hunting Season Summary**

A complete and detailed summary of the 2009 wolf hunting season has been completed and is being distributed as a separate document. It will also be available on the FWP Wolf Web page. As FWP continues to compile information and proof data for the 2009 annual report, minor revisions and corrections may occur. The 2009 annual report will provide its usual comprehensive record of

Montana wolves and their management for the calendar year. The report is expected to be completed and available in early March, 2010.

#### Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 12/2, FWP submitted its court brief arguing against a lawsuit filed by a coalition of environmental groups seeking to turn back the federal decision to remove gray wolves in most of the northern Rocky Mountains from the federal list of endangered species. The brief outlined how Montana's track record of wolf management is proven and adequate, Montana's belief that leaving wolves listed in Wyoming does comply with the federal Endangered Species Act, and that connectivity requirements have been met and will continue to be met into the future. The federal government's court brief had been filed the previous week on 11/23. The plaintiffs have until December 31 to reply to the federal government's brief and those filed by interveners, such as Montana, who support the federal decision.

##### Background:

On 6/2, a coalition of 13 groups challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9<sup>th</sup> Circuit). On 8/20, a preliminary injunction request was filed, requesting that wolves be placed back on the Endangered Species list while the court decides the main case within the next year – thus preventing a fall hunting season in Montana and Idaho. On 9/8, the injunction request was denied, but the main lawsuit is moving forward. Written briefings by all parties will be completed by late January 2010. A hearing date for oral arguments has not been set, but is expected to be not long after completion of written briefings.

During the course of the litigation, Montana state laws, administrative rules, and the federally-approved management plan remain in effect. Wolves are classified and protected under Montana law as a species in need of management. The FWP Commission has the authority to issue rules and regulations regarding the protection and periodic taking of the animal (as through hunting seasons for example). FWP is the lead agency for wolves, assisted by USDA Wildlife Services if wolves are confirmed to have injured or killed livestock.

#### Wolf Season Proposals Postponed until spring 2010:

FWP and the FWP Commission postponed consideration of the 2010 wolf hunting season. FWP and the public will first focus on the proposals for big game (e.g. deer, elk, antelope, bison, moose, sheep, goat, lion, black bear), upland game birds, and several statewide proposals during the month of January. The public can learn more about these proposals and comment, see [2010-2011 Proposed Hunting Seasons - MFWP](#). The public meetings schedule is also available. The deadline for public comment on these proposals is 5 PM on Friday, January 22, 2010.

Once the Commission makes final decisions on those proposals in February 2010, attention will then shift to wolf season regulations for 2010/2011 and the 2010 season quotas. FWP and the Commission are aware of the significant public interest and want to allow adequate time for consideration and public comment. FWP will alert the public through media releases and the Wolf Weekly Report when those meetings are scheduled and provide information about how to participate in the process. Working on the wolf regulations and quotas in late spring / early summer will still allow enough time for production of the regulations.

#### Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The Board met on October 23. The agenda and minutes from previous meetings are available at [Montana Department of Livestock](#). The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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